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AUTHOR Gee, Thomas C.
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ABSTRACT

This briefly annotated bibliography is designed to accommodate intermediate grade students' interests in the American Revolution. Books were included based on the following criteria: (1) appealing content (action, humor, in-depth accounts); (2) authenticated information; and (3) good literary style (vivid, realistic dialog and language). Of the 30 books listed, 23 deal with individual figures of the American Revolution, and 7 are general books about the Revolution. (LL)

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Factual Literature About the American Revolution: The Intermediate Grades

Recently, a group of teachers asked for assistance in preparing a specialized reading list for their intermediate grade students. Specifically, the teachers wanted a bibliography of non-fiction books which would include some of the best biography and fact-books about life during the American Revolution.

Frankly I was doubtful that intermediate grade students would be interested in reading more about the American Revolution. I thought that historical literature about the period would seem remote to this age student and that they would already be weary of reading about America's early days. Fortunately, I was able to talk with several groups of students before I gave up the bibliography project as a fruitless cause. As I talked with the students, I asked such questions as: "Would you prefer to read made-up stories or true stories?", "What true stories do you already know of famous Americans of the Revolutionary Period?", "What aspects about daily life during America's early days would you like to know more about?", etc. Most of my convictions that they would be reluctant to read more about the life and times were abated. In fact, many students asked for books that would tell them more about specific figures of the times, more about adventures at sea and in the forts, and more about Indians during the period.

Students had apparently been introduced to a great deal about America's struggles for independence. Most could recall numerous leaders of the era; and they imagined, quite accurately, that life during those years was characterized by a lack of modern conveniences, by battles to assure our own laws and taxes, and by men and women who had to work hard just to eat well. Schools, community celebrations, and the media have obviously provided students with a broad understanding of life during the American Revolution. They seemed eager to know more, too.

Having a general idea of what life must have been like between 1760-1780, students asked for suggestions for books about specific events and people rather than for literature which was more introductory in nature. Several students, for example, mentioned that

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they had heard rumors that Betsy Ross had not made the first American flag or that George Washington's "Cherry Tree Story" was more fiction than fact. What they wanted now was literature that would help them verify accounts they had read. Most students asked for books that would provide authenticated information.

While the students preferred factual accounts to fiction, they preferred writing styles that were common to fiction. In other words, they found fictionalized biography more appealing than authentic biography. Since most intermediate students were comfortable in reading books that contained dialog and narration, they requested books which contained fast-moving stories rather than books which contained lengthy passages about politics and philosophy of the times.

Information from students and their teachers helped me to limit the scope of the following bibliography. The fact-finding interviews with students convinced me that they knew a great deal about Revolutionary times; that they preferred to read true accounts to fictionalized accounts; that they enjoyed narrative styles to exposition; and, most importantly, that they were interested in reading fiction about the American Revolution. Contrary to what I had originally expected, these students had not become desensitized to the bicentennial celebration or disillusioned by the commercialism that has accompanied this bicentennial year.

The following bibliography tries to accommodate students' interests in learning more about the American Revolution. Books included in the bibliography met several criteria. First, books were included only if they contained content that was appealing to students (action, humor, in-depth accounts). Attempts were also made to exclude books which contained unauthenticated information. Only books which were written in a reasonably good literary style were included (vivid, realistic dialog; balanced portrayal of figures as human beings; vigorous and dramatic language). Finally, only books which were written for students in grades 4-8 were included.

Selected Inventory of Bicentennial-Related
Non-Fiction--Grades 4-8

John Q. Adams

John Adams was the second president of the United States. He helped shape America into an independent nation. By reading John Q. Adams: Son of the American Revolution (grades 7-8) by Milton Lomax, you can understand what life was like during the beginnings of our country.

Ethan Allen

If you don't know why Ethan Allen formed a group of soldiers into an army called the Green Mountain Boys or why and how he captured the now famous Fort Ticonderoga, read Slater Brown's Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys (grades 5-7).

Steward Holbrook's America's Ethan Allen (grades 4-8) is another rousing story about Ethan Allen. Told with spirit and a fast pace, Holbrook's story also contains beautiful color illustrations of our country during the Revolutionary War.

Mr. and Mrs. Benedict Arnold

Benedict Arnold is not an American most of us admire. Once an important general for the American Revolutionary Army, he is now most often remembered for what he did against the United States. Find out how and why he was branded as a traitor. Read Ronald Syme's Benedict Arnold: Traitor of the Revolution (grades 5-8).

While Benedict Arnold is remembered as an enemy of the United States, Mrs. Benedict Arnold is not. Milton Lomask has written a beautiful story about Mrs. Arnold and how her husband's treachery affected their lives. Read Beauty and the Traitor (grades 5-8).

Benjamin Franklin

We've all heard of Benjamin Franklin's contributions as a statesman and inventor. But did you know that he was also a painter, printer, and writer? Read one or more of the following books about Ben Franklin to find out what made Franklin a great man. You may also find that he made a few mistakes in his life.

Did you know that Ben Franklin was one of seventeen children or that he ran away from home? Ingri and Edgar d'Aularie's Benjamin Franklin (grades 2-5) is an exciting story of Benjamin Franklin's life and accomplishments. This simple and vigorous story about Franklin helps us to learn about Franklin and his time. Drawings and some of Franklin's famous sayings make this book especially appealing.

American Heritage and Frank Donovan present The Many Worlds of Benjamin Franklin (grades 4-8). This good biography highlights Franklin's varied talents and presents outstanding illustrations of his times.

For a frank and balanced picture about Franklin read Thomas Fleming's Benjamin Franklin (grades 4-8). This book contains quotations from Franklin's lettters and speeches. You can learn a great deal about his boyhood, his work in the newspaper industry, and his inventions.

Patrick Henry

If you would like to know more about the personal life of Patrick Henry, read Nardi Campion's Patrick Henry: Firebrand of the Revolution (grades 4-8). This story about Patrick Henry portrays the exciting events of Henry's careers as lawyer, soldier, governor, and champion of liberty.

John Paul Jones

Want to read about one of our earliest sailors? Armstrong Sperry's John Paul Jones: Fighting Sailor (grades 5-7) is an action account of one hero who fought his best when the odds of winning were against him. Read about his famous sea battles.

Francis Marion

Francis Marion was a guerrilla fighter who watched as 300 British ships moved on Charleston. If you'd like to read how Marion and his men reacted, read M. M. Brown's Swamp Fox (grades 4-6) -- a tale full of action.

Casimir Pulaski

Even Polish Counts fought on the American side during the Revolution. Read Dorothy Adams' Cavalry Hero: Casimir Pulaski (grades 5-8) if you like factual and interesting tales of Europeans who fought on America's side.

Paul Revere

Paul Revere is best remembered for his midnight ride to warn the colonists that the British were coming. Want to know all about that ride and about Revere's other contributions? Read one or more of the factual books about him.

R. Z. Kelly's Paul Revere: Colonial Craftsman (grades 4-6) provides a description of Revere's talents in crafts: silversmithing, copper engraving, and bell casting.

Pleasant and easy to understand, Esther Forbes' America's Paul Revere (grades 4-6) highlights the exciting events in Paul Revere's life. Dramatic pictures help recreate the spirit of his life and times.

Dorothy C. Fisher's Paul Revere and the Minute Men (grades 4-8) provides details of the midnight ride plus interesting details of Revere's life before the ride.

Betsy Ross

According to legend, Betsy Ross made the first American flag, but there is little evidence to substantiate this. Would you like to read how the flag originated? If so, read The Stars and Stripes: The Story of Our Flag by Irving Werstein (grades 4-8).

George Washington

Want to read an appealing story about the Father of our Country? Ingri and Edgar d'Aulaire have written a simple account of his life and illustrated the boook with numerous drawings. Read their book George Washington (grades 2-5).

One of the most popular biographies of Washington is Genevieve Foster's George Washington (grades 3-5). Her book omits popular stories which are now known to lack authenticity. History and customs of the period are creatively woven into the story account of President Washington.

Sterling North's George Washington: Frontier Colonel (grades 4-6) is not a complete story of Washington's life. With factual information from Washington's letters and journals, this book focuses on Washington's role in the French and Indian War.

Martha Washington

If you like history, romance, and true stories about people, you will enjoy reading M. Vance's Martha: Daughter of Virginia (grades 5-7). This book tells how a young woman from Virginia became the First Lady of the United States. Drawings add to the enjoyment of the writing.

Benjamin West

Benjamin West's parents didn't approve of his wish to paint pictures, but his cat, who could almost talk, encouraged him. Read Marguerite Henry and Wesley Dennis' Benjamin West and His Cat Grimalkin (grades 4-6) if you want to know how Benjamin became a great painter. Drawings accompany the book.

Phillis Wheatley

When she was five years old, Phillis Wheatley was bought as a slave. During her life she learned to write beautiful poetry--much of which sang of the joys of freedom. Read some of Phillis' poetry and about the sad events of her life as a black woman during the Revolution. Read Shirley Graham's The Story of Phillis Wheatley: Poetess of the American Revolution (intermediate grades).

Peter Zenger

Today, newspaper writers are sometimes accused of being too critical of our leaders. Read how Peter Zenger went to trial for defying the Governor of New York by printing articles critical of the governor's crooked political deals. Zenger's trial helped establish freedom of the press in America and England. Although the details are fictionalized, the content is based on research from newspapers, legal documents, and private letters. Read Tom Galt's Fighter for Freedom (grades 5-8).

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1. After reading C. B. Colby's Revolutionary War Weapons (grades 5-7) you will have a good understanding of what the revolutionary soldiers had to be like. You will also see photographs and descriptions of lances, flintlock muskets, pistols, and tomahawks.
2. H. S. Commanger's The Great Constitution: A Book for Young Americans (grade 5+) is a dramatic story of how the framework of our nation was devised.

3. The Great Declaration (grades 4-5) by H. S. Commanger uses official diaries, letters, and pen sketches to weave together the story of the Declaration of Independence.
4. If you would like to have an artist's idea of what Revolutionary war heroes were like, check out Leonard Fisher's Picture Book of Revolutionary War Heroes.
5. Like to read about early spies and undercover agents? Rae Foley's Famous American Spies (grades 5-8) gives accurate and well-told portraits of American spies from Paul Revere to the Civil War.
6. Bruce Lancaster writes with color and drama. His book The American Revolution (grades 5-8) covers military campaigns and important people from the beginnings of the Revolutionary War to the departure of the last British soldiers.
7. The First Book of the American Revolution (grades 5-9) by Richard B. Morris gives a stirring account of the American colonists' fight for independence.

Suggestions to Teachers for Using the Inventory of Bicentennial-Related Non-Fiction

1. Distribute the inventory to students as a selection tool. If students can read the inventory independently, they can read the annotations and choose a book to read. Some students find it difficult to read annotated bibliographies. For these students, read one or two annotations a day to them. Students can select a book to read from your bicentennial-minute book talk.
2. Select a book from the inventory that you think students might enjoy reading. Read interesting passages from the book or prepare an informal book talk. Introducing Books: A Guide for the Middle Grades or Juniorplots provide good suggestions for book talks and suggestions for read-aloud passages.
3. Allow small groups of students to read the same book. Encourage them to meet daily to talk informally about what they have read.
4. Where two or more good books have been written about the same person or event, encourage students to read two accounts and to compare the books.

Thomas C Lee
Associate Professor
University of Houston at Clear Lake City
2700 Bay Area Blvd., Houston, TX 77058